

The Deadliest Types of Car Accidents

Make sure you know the risks to stay safe on the road

Every time we drive, our lives are in the hands of other motorists. No matter how carefully and defensively you drive, it only takes one drunk, distracted, or speeding driver to change your life forever – or end it. [Car accidents](#) kill thousands of Americans every year, and most are preventable.

This is why accountability for drivers who cause fatal wrecks is so important. Here are the types of car accidents that cause the most fatalities – and the role negligence plays in each one.

1. Angle crashes, including T-bone crashes

An “angle” crash is any wreck in which the front of one car hits the side of another car. When one car hits another at a 90-degree angle, we often call it a T-bone, side-impact, or broadside collision. According to the [National Safety Council](#), angle collisions cause more fatalities than any other type of collision between motor vehicles, with approximately 8,000 deaths in 2020 alone.

The main reason angle collisions are so dangerous is that the side of a car provides much less protection for drivers and passengers than the front or rear. There’s only a couple of inches of metal between you and the full impact of a vehicle that weighs thousands of pounds.

Unfortunately, angle collisions can also lead to complicated and contentious legal cases, because it’s not always clear who was at fault. These crashes usually happen at intersections, where witnesses may disagree on what color the light was or which vehicle had the right of way. Camera footage, if available, can be critical to establishing liability for a T-bone or other intersection accident. Accident reconstruction experts may also be retained to get to the bottom of what happened and why.

2. Head-on collisions

The National Safety Council says that head-on accidents are the second-deadliest type of collision between vehicles, with about 5,000 fatalities in 2020. While the front of a car provides much more protection than the side, the nature of a head-on collision also means the amount of force is higher, especially at highway speeds. When two cars traveling at 50 miles per hour in opposite directions collide head-on, that’s the equivalent force of one vehicle traveling at 100 miles per hour.

Head-on collisions often involve egregiously bad driving behavior, such as driving drunk or under the influence of drugs. Motorists who fall asleep at the wheel may also drift into the oncoming lane. Occasionally, texting or distracted drivers do the same. Finally, some head-on collisions are caused by motorists who make aggressive maneuvers, like illegal turns, or are simply unfamiliar with the area and end up going the wrong way down a one-way street.

Either way, head-on collisions can lead to hard-fought legal cases. Almost by definition, *someone* had to be going the wrong way, but witnesses may disagree as to which car that was. Again, a thorough investigation, potentially assisted by experts, is key in head-on accident cases.

3. Rear-end collisions

You may think of rear-end accidents as relatively minor, but they can still cause serious and even fatal injuries. According to the National Safety Council, rear-end wrecks caused about 3,000 deaths in 2020.

In part, that's due to sheer weight of numbers: rear-end collisions are the most common type of car accident, so even if they aren't as deadly on a per-accident basis as other types, the total number of fatalities is still substantial. Rear-end accidents can also be much deadlier when there is a significant size disparity between the vehicles: think of a car rear-ending a motorcycle, for instance, or a tractor-trailer rear-ending a car. This is potentially more likely to occur because a smaller vehicle usually also has a shorter stopping distance than a larger vehicle.

Liability (that is, fault for the accident) usually isn't disputed in rear-end cases since there is a strong presumption that the driver of the rear vehicle is at fault. That said, in some circumstances – for instance, if the front vehicle was illegally parked or had defective brake lights or hazard lights – the driver of the front vehicle can be at fault. Insurance companies may also dispute the extent of the injuries, especially if the crash happens at a low speed. Victims of rear-end accidents need an experienced attorney to build a strong case for the full compensation they deserve.

4. Sideswipe and other collisions with vehicles

Most fatal two-vehicle accidents fall into one of the categories listed above. Most of the remaining accidents are sideswipes – when the side of one vehicle hits the side of another, often when one driver tries to change lanes or merge without looking.

As with rear-end accidents, many people associate sideswipes with minor property damage instead of serious injury, but that's a misconception. Even a low-impact crash can cause a serious injury depending on how the force of impact is transferred into someone's body. Moreover, a sideswipe crash can cause one or both vehicles to lose stability, which can lead to a chain reaction that ends with a rollover or a collision with a third vehicle. An experienced attorney can investigate and get to the bottom of what happened.

5. Rollovers and other non-collision incidents

Not every fatal car accident is a collision between two vehicles. According to the NSC data, about 3,300 fatalities in 2020 were in non-collisions, a category that includes rollovers. Any vehicle can roll over, but tall vehicles with high centers of gravity, such as SUVs, pickup trucks,

and vans, are most at risk. Rollovers can be incredibly dangerous because the weight of the vehicle can cause the roof to collapse.

Just because an accident doesn't involve contact does not necessarily mean another vehicle wasn't at fault. Many rollovers and other non-collisions involve a "phantom vehicle" that was involved without contact; for instance, the phantom vehicle may have forced another driver to swerve or run off the road to avoid a possible collision. In these circumstances, you may have a claim against the driver of the phantom vehicle, if identified, or an uninsured motorist claim if they are not.

Another consideration in many non-collision cases is the manufacturer of the vehicle itself. For instance, in a rollover, the manufacturer can be held accountable if the vehicle's design put occupants at risk. An experienced car accident attorney can investigate the circumstances surrounding your accident and advise you of your legal options.

If you were injured or lost a loved one, talk to a car accident attorney

Again, any car wreck can have life-altering consequences. If you were injured, you're looking at medical expenses, lost income, and an uncertain future. If you tragically lost a loved one in a car crash, you need help to pursue the accountability and closure your family needs while you focus on rebuilding your life. That's where a car accident lawyer can make a meaningful difference.

Remember, you only have a limited amount of time to take legal action after a car accident in Texas, and we need to start our investigation before important evidence disappears. The insurance company has legal representation, and you should too. [Contact Smith & Hassler](#) today for a free consultation with an experienced car accident attorney.